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ABSTRACT

This study, targeting grades four through eight, evaluates New York City's options for incorporating educational technology into classrooms within existing school facilities. The study reports on: (1) what physical configurations of educational technology can best accommodate different and evolving methods of integrating computers into the curriculum; (2) what configurations existing classrooms can support with regard to space, equipment location, and electrical power; and (3) what configurations will be most cost effective and workable with existing conditions. (GR)

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Ezra Ehrenkrantz

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Technology Options

for New York City Public School Classrooms

Prepared for:
The New York City School Construction Authority

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April 11, 1997

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Introduction & Methodology

This is a study, prepared for the New York City School Construction Authority, whose principal aim is to provide options for the incorporation of education technology into classrooms within existing New York City public school buildings. This study is particularly targeted at grades 4 through 8.

This study was performed over a four week period in March and April of 1997. The primary questions that the study sought to address are:

- What physical configurations of educational technology can best accommodate different and evolving methods of integrating computers into the curriculum?
- What configurations can existing classrooms support with regard to space, equipment location and electrical power?
- What configurations will be most cost effective, and work with existing conditions, while meeting the criteria of the previous two questions?

The methods used in this study include a review of precedents throughout the nation and overseas; correspondence with representatives of selected schools in the United States and Australia; visits to selected sites in New York City, including Public School 66 in Richmond Hill, Queens; and a review of recent trends in the computer hardware and software industries.

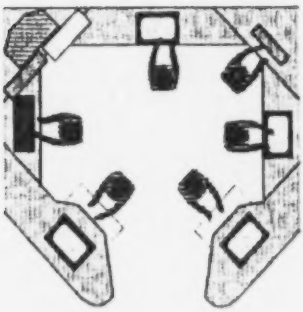
Underlying the study are several basic assumptions, including an understanding that four computers and one printer will be provided to each fourth through eighth grade classroom as part of a forthcoming NYC Board of Education program. In an era where no single educational philosophy currently exists with regard to how technology should be applied in classrooms, certain assumptions had to be made about how the technology might be applied. For example, based upon a variety of precedents, scenarios were con-

sidered where the number of students working at compu
ranged from one student at a time to as many as six students w
ing as a group.

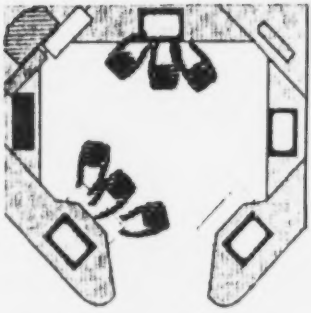
The options presented in this report have been develope
address up to four students per computer at one time. Howe
since four is a large number of students to use a computer at
time, the study does not assume that this will typically be how
computers are used. Groups larger than four students per c
puter generally require more square footage and special
equipment than the forthcoming program will be able to provi

Scenarios were also considered where one of the four compu
would be dedicated as a teacher's station and also be availabl
student use. Distinguishing this computer from the others, in
tain scenarios, permits it to be outfitted, initially or in the future,
more robust multi-media, communications and presentation c
bilities and act as a nexus for the students' computers.

These scenarios were then considered in relation to typical cl
room layouts and equipment as well as the constraints inhere
existing electrical systems.



Individual Work



Small Group Work

Above: A plan diagram of a six student work station. (from Redefining the Place to Learn, NJIT, 1994)

Executive Summary

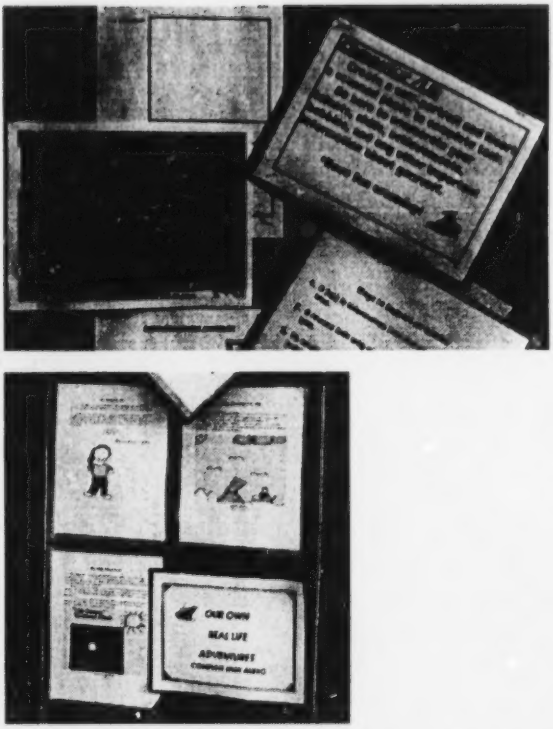
Throughout the nation and, in fact, around the world, advanc
educational technology are having a dramatic impact on pr
and secondary education and they are also having a dra
influence on the physical environment that we provide as a s
for our children's education.

Educational technology is integrated into schools across the r
in widely varying ways. The possible permutations on how
puters are applied to primary and secondary education are vi
ly as numerous as there are numbers of teachers. Some sc
use technology for the remediation of basic skills, while other
technology to "teach across the curriculum" and create "lea
centered" curricula. However, one pervasive trend is that tec
ogy is no longer principally being placed in separate com
labs. It is being integrated directly into the classroom and us
a tool for learning rather than being considered primarily as a
ject unto itself.

This integration of technology into schools, and classrooms i
ticular, is accelerating and the New York City public school
now well positioned to take advantage of the experiences of
schools throughout the world that have led the way. With t
mind, the Board of Education and the School Constru
Authority have made the commitment to install four computer
one printer in the system's fourth through eighth grade classro

Student to Computer Ratios and Lesson Planning

In comparison to many of these precedent schools, this alloc
of resources — resulting in a student to computer ratio of ap
mately seven-to-one, assuming a typical class of twenty-s
students — is not unusual for primary or secondary schools
United States. A seven-to-one ratio of students to computer
permit the development of lesson plans that engage between
seventh to one-third of a typical class at the computers at one



Above: Two displays of students' computer generated work. (PS 66, Richmond Hill, Queens)

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(The 7:1 ratio is derived by one student working at each computer, while the 3:1 ratio is derived by two students working together at each of three computers and three students working together at one computer.) Groups of students of these numbers are also consistent with many teachers' approaches to lesson planning, particularly when one-third of the class can be engaged in an activity at a single time. The options presented in this document have been developed to address this range of students using the computers. (See Note 1)

Existing Classrooms and Infrastructure

New York City Board of Education owns approximately 1,100 schools that were built over a period of approximately one hundred years. Most of the classrooms in these buildings were not intended to house computer technology. In fact, these classrooms are often relatively small for the number of students, and the amount of equipment, that are already housed within them. Students' desks typically occupy most of the free floor space.

In some instances, these spatial constraints will rule out the use of certain space intensive configurations of computer stations. For example, "island" configurations generally require greater circulation space than other configurations.

Much of the perimeter of these classrooms is typically occupied by built-in casework and tack and chalk boards, and windows and heating equipment often occupy a large percentage of the exterior wall. The placement of fixed computer stations along the perimeter wall will accordingly, require that a balance be struck between the use of these existing features and the new computer stations. The windows also introduce a potential for glare on the computer screens that must be considered with fixed computer stations.

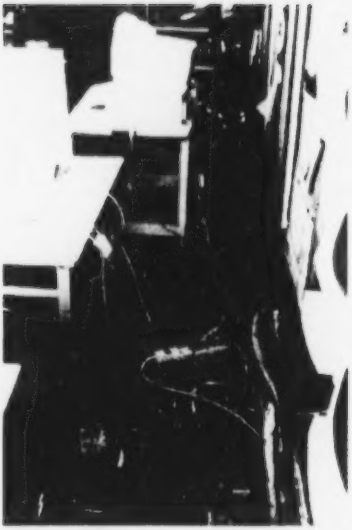
Another deciding factor in installing educational technology i existing buildings is the available electrical power and distribut infrastructure. Many of New York City's school buildings have l ited unused electrical capacity in their distribution systems and capacity that is available may be provided to each classro through a single, inconveniently located wall outlet.

At P.S. 66, for example, where there are fewer computers classroom on average than the forthcoming BOE/SCA program proposing, it was noted that electrical circuits are often "blow Locating fixed computer stations in the school requires a decis between locating near an available a/c outlet, developing a co approved outlet assembly to enable placing computers where th integrate best with the available space and the lesson plan, reworking the electrical distribution system. Similarly, if powe not available, both the capacity and the distribution system have to be reworked.

With the limited resources available to this BOE/SCA program, challenge will be to allocate the greatest amount of money av able directly to the investment in computers, printers and softw versus upgrading inadequate electrical infrastructure.

These circumstances and assumptions provided the context preparing the options presented in this study. The options ha been developed using both "desktop" and "laptop" compute These options are designed to enable educational technology be deployed in varying configurations depending upon the opp tunities and constraints presented by each classroom and sch building and to accommodate a variety of teaching strategies.

Hybrid solutions, using a mix of desktop and laptop compute may be developed from the elements of several options. Finally decision-making framework is presented after the options to ass in the selection of the appropriate configuration.



Above: *Inadequate space and a/c distribution can result in hazardous cabling situations.*

Guidelines

The following general guidelines should be considered when installing educational technology into the classrooms. Please note that the applicability of certain guidelines may change if laptop computers are used.

- At least two people should be able to comfortably work together at a single computer. These could be two students or a student and the teacher or a teacher's aid. This room may be provided by strategically placing desks so that no more than two computers sit directly adjacent to one another or by distributing the computers on surfaces of sufficient width for two to work comfortably at a computer.

- Appropriate space for circulation should be left behind the computer station. Normally a space 3'6" deep, measured perpendicularly from the edge of the table, should be provided for circulation space behind the computer stations.

- Computers should be situated to minimize glare from windows and overhead lighting. In general, computer screens and/or their viewers should not directly face windows.

- Provide accessible computer stations that are designed to accommodate mobility impaired students.

- Consider where network cabling may be run through the building in the future and locate computer stations to conveniently be able to "tie into" this network. For example, if the corridor will be used to distribute the network cabling, locate the computer stations, if possible, so that they can accept feeder lines directly from the corridor wall.

- Purchase furniture that has integral cable management features. Carts should have power strips built-in.

- Consider locating telephone jacks adjacent to the computer stations to provide access to the Internet and other online services. (Cart-based or laptop computers may be moved to jacks.)

- Provide additional storage for floppy disks, CD-ROM's, printer paper and toner cartridges, and other assorted computer related supplies.

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The Components

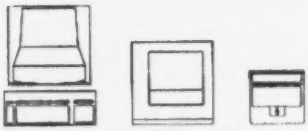
The most fundamental components to be installed in the cl
rooms are computers and printers. The dimensions and attrib
of these components vary by manufacturer. Extensions of
basic system may include, at a later date and under a different
ital program: scanners, digital cameras, audio and video dev
and a variety of output devices including large format screens
video systems.

Accordingly, this study has been developed around the initial
cation of four computers and one printer per classroom. Th
four computers can be distributed in a variety of configurations
will be presented in the next section, but for the moment, two
ations should be considered with regard to how these four c
puters are allocated.

The first variation treats, and outfits, all four of the computers
same. A second variation outfits one computer with more ro
multi-media, communications and presentation capabilities
the other three. This concentrates expenditures on one comp
which may provide the students with access to features that c
not be afforded for all four computers (e.g.: a larger screen, a fa
micro-processor, more advanced multi-media production and
sentation tools, etc.)

In this second variation, students could begin multi-media pro
on one of the other three computers and then transfer their file
the "teacher's station" for final production and presentation
options using laptop computers, the teacher's station can als
used as a fixed printing or demonstration station. In all of
options presented, the teaching station may be remotely locat
relation to the students' computers, such as at the teacher's c

With regard to the spatial requirements of these components,
assumed that all of these computers will have a mouse, trac



Top: *A teacher's station with a large presentation screen (from The Seattle Schools School Design Notebook, NJIT, 1992)*

Above: *A plan diagram of a desktop computer, a printer and a laptop computer.*

or a similar pointing device, and that some computers r
external audio speakers.

A desktop computer, a mouse and external speakers, in a
needed work space adjacent to a desktop computer (f
pencils and paper, CD-ROM and floppy disk cases, etc.),
fortably be accommodated on a 30" deep by 42" wide,
work surface. This dimension would also permit two st
work comfortably side by side at each computer station.

In contrast to desktop computers, the compact "footprint"
grated pointing devices of laptop computers do not req
surfaces to be as large and, with the exception of a cha
printing station, they do not require dedicated furniture.

The work surface modules used per computer for this stu
from 30" by 42" down to 30" by 30." The smaller dimens
very adequate for one student, inhibits the ability of two
to work together. As the width decreases, the potential fo
and flexibility may be compromised, particularly for older

In some instances, the depth of the work surface can be
by specifying furniture that features pull-out keyboard/mo
mounted beneath the table top. However, a 30" depth fou
surface may provide the flexibility to place a printer, or
date, a scanner or other peripheral device, at the back o
face that lesser dimensions may not provide.

The specification of furniture components must also
accessibility issues. Because of its unique features, the
station may also adapt well to being an accessible statio

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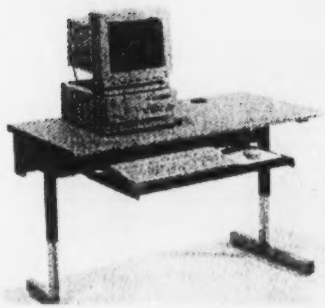


Above: An example of a computer station with a pull-out keyboard and mouse tray.

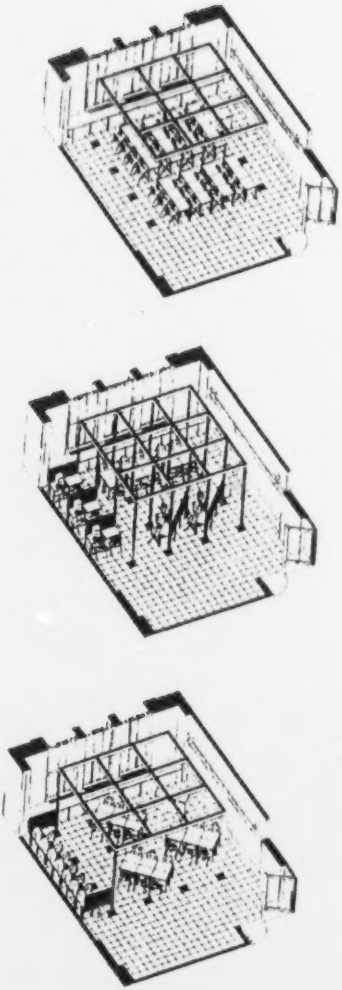
Cable management systems

Desktop computers typically require an array of power and c
cabling. This cabling can present a tripping hazard, occupy
cious work surfaces, detract visually from the classroom an
some instances violate the Building Code. New furnishings bou
for this program should take advantage of the many cable m
agement systems that have been integrated into systems furnit
such as cable troughs concealed in modesty panels and ver
cable channels concealed within table legs.

Consideration should also be given to the physical requirement
providing building-wide data access in the future. Currently
requires additional space in cable troughs and chann
However, these requirements are changing as "wireless" techn
gies evolve.

With provisions for new infrastructure, in most of the options
sented, a/c access can be gained directly from wall mounted
lets. The exception is the "island configuration." Assuming that
only a/c outlets provided are wall mounted outlets, power
islands will have to be supplied through the floor, or from the
ing through "power poles." The former may require drilling thro
the floor to provide access and the latter may require running c
duit across the ceiling of the classrooms or running cable abov
dropped ceiling.

If new power and distribution systems are provided to correct
inadequate existing power, the new systems should be desig
for, perhaps, two or three times the utilization of computers tha
currently being proposed. This will, as the use of educational te
nology continues to increase, reduce the likelihood of havin
perform another electrical upgrade in the foreseeable future.



Left: *A series of diagrams showing how a classroom was designed to use power poles, connected to a ceiling grid, to accommodate varying configurations of educational technology. (Ehrenkrantz & Eckstut Architects' Prototype School System)*

The Options

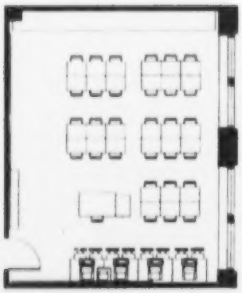
The options for installing educational technology in existing c
rooms can be divided into two broad categories based upo
degree of mobility inherent in the configuration. A third cat
can be developed through hybrids created by combining elem
contained in the two other categories.

The two basic categories are: Stationary Systems and Por
Systems. Stationary systems use desktop computers and pri
that are placed and powered in fixed locations. Portable sys
are more or less available to be relocated throughout the c
room and in some circumstances, beyond the classroom.

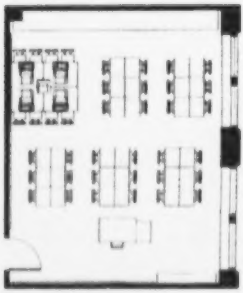
However, for one of the portable system options, it should be r
that laptop computers require recharging and storage sta
which may be served by the electrical system when the c
room's lighting is turned off. A disconnect switch may be ne
to ensure that recharging does not occur during periods whe
demand for electricity is great. Another option is to pr
recharging during the day from an available outlet if adeq
power is available. (See Note 4 for more detail.)

The two primary categories can be further subdivided into th
lowing types:

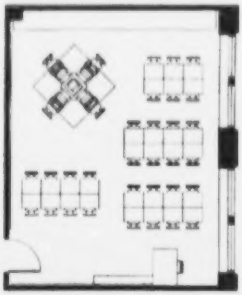
- Stationary Systems
  - 1. Perimeter configurations
  - 2. Peninsula configurations
  - 3. Island configurations
- Portable Systems
  - 4. Cart-based configurations
  - 5. Laptop configurations
- Hybrid Systems include:
  - 6. Desktop and laptop configurations



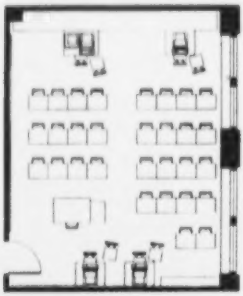
Option 1 - Perimeter



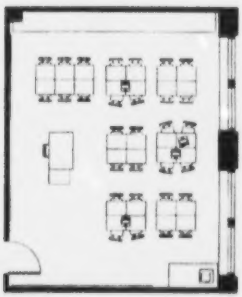
Option 2 - Peninsula



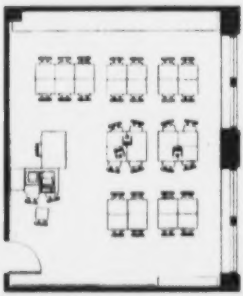
Option 3 - Island



Option 4 - Carts



Option 5 - Laptops



Option 6 - A Desktop & Laptops

On the previous page, a diagrammatic floor plan showing one possible application of each configuration in a classroom was presented. On the following pages, a larger diagram of each of these configurations is presented along with its advantages and disadvantages.

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1. Stationary Systems — Perimeter Configuration

Basic Components

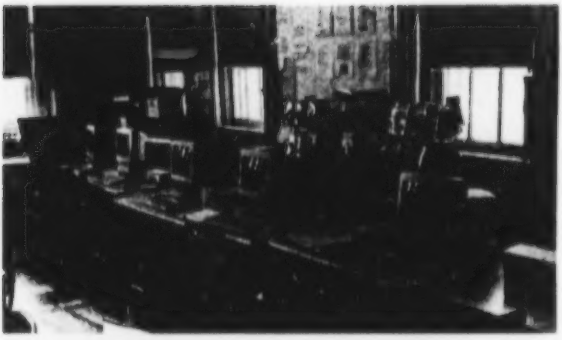
- Four Desktop Computers
- Four Computer Stations with Chairs
- One Printer

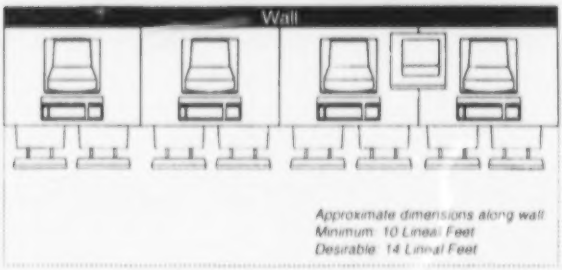
Advantages

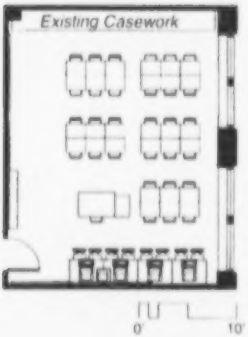
- Potential for convenient a/c and data access from the
- May have potential to be integrated into perimeter c work.
- Stations may be located adjacent to one another or dis uted.
- Adjacency may facilitate local networking of compu permitting the sharing of data and resources (i.e.: prin among computers.

Disadvantages

- May occupy limited wall space that is being used, or could be used, for other activities or equipment.
- Glare may be an issue if the computers face exterior dows.
- If the perimeter space is limited, the size and adjacen furnishings may in turn limit the number of students ab work at each station.







Top: *Photo of Perimeter configuration at PS 66.*

Above: *Plan diagram of the Perimeter Configuration. The desks measure 30" by 42". Dashed line represents circulation.*

Left: *Plan diagram of Perimeter configuration in typical classroom*

2. Stationary Systems — Peninsular Configuration

Basic Components

- Four Desktop Computers
- Four Computer Stations with Chairs
- One Printer

Advantages

- Potential for convenient a/c and data access fro
- Stations may be located adjacent to one another uted.
- May have potential to be integrated into perim work.
- Adjacency may facilitate local networking of c permitting the sharing of data and resources (i.e among computers.
- The corners of the work stations, if unobstructed vide increased opportunities for students to gath a computer.

Disadvantages

- Glare may be an issue if computer screens fac windows
- May require more circulation/total square f Perimeter Configurations.
- May occupy limited wall space that could be use activities or equipment (albeit less space than is for the perimeter configuration.)
- Size and adjacency of furnishings may limit the n students able to work at each station.

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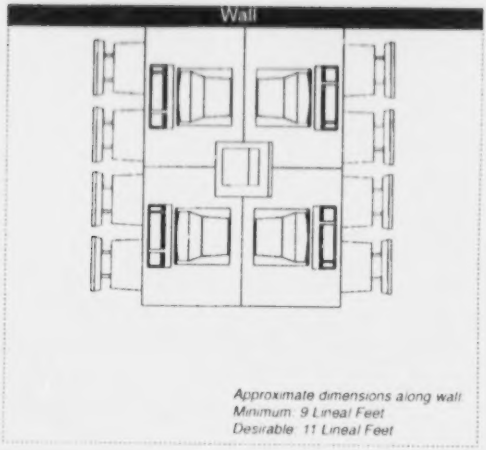

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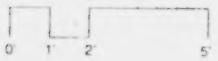

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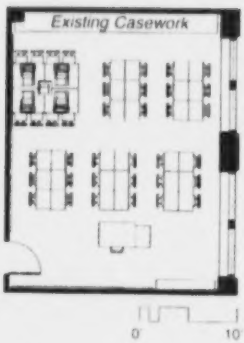


Above: *Plan diagram of the Peninsular Configuration. The desks measure 30" by 42". The dashed line represents circulation.*

Left: *Plan diagram of Peninsular Configuration in typical classroom.*

Note: *The photo on the cover is of a Peninsular Configuration at PS 66.*

3. Stationary Systems — Island Configurations

Basic Components

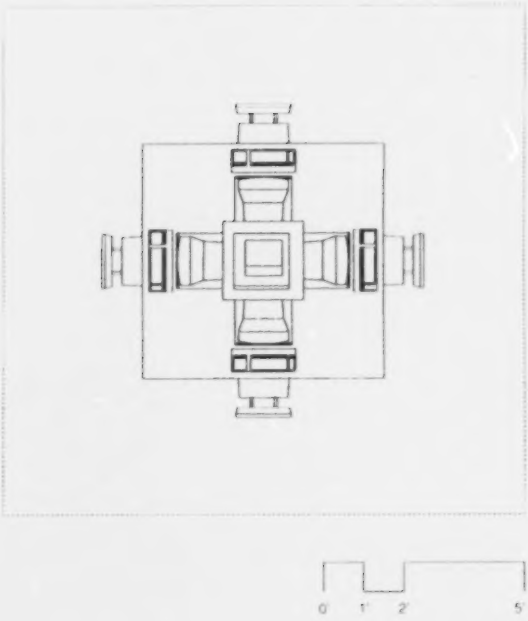
- Four Desktop Computers
- Four Computer Stations with Chairs
- One Printer

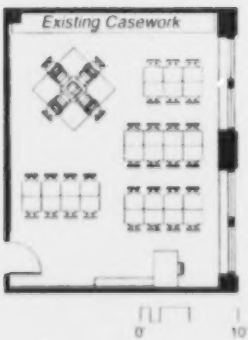
Advantages

- Adjacency may facilitate local networking of compu permitting the sharing of data and resources (i.e.: prin among computers.
- Has greater potential to accommodate multiple studer each station than some perimeter and peninsular cor rations.
- Is a good configuration for group learning activities. (V outside of the scope of this study, it should be noted this configuration works particularly well in library and oratory settings.)

Disadvantages

- A/C and data access must be provided through the flo from the ceiling.
- May require the greatest amount of square footage of the options.





Above: *Plan diagram of the Island Configuration. The table can vary in size and shape. In this example, each side of the table is 6-feet long and the printer is elevated above the computers on a shelf. The dashed line represents circulation.*

Left: *Plan diagram of an Island Configuration in typical classroom.*

4. Portable Systems — Cart-Based Configurations

Basic Components

- Four Desktop Computers
- Four Computer Carts
- One Printer

Advantages

- When not in use, stored carts may require less spa
  desktop computers located on stationary desks. Fo
  ple, they may be able to be stored in traditional cart
  areas under counters.
- The number of students that can sit around a com
  cart is not necessarily limited by adjacent fixed obj
- Portability could facilitate sharing of the co
  resources between classrooms if a/c outlets are av
- Portability can enable computers to access distrib
  outlets throughout the room, if available.

Disadvantages

- A/C and data access may be a problem.
- Mobility may be limited by the available circulatio
  the classroom.
- Actual mobility may be limited by the time require
  up and store the carts.
- Trailing wires will present problems if the carts ca
  located directly adjacent to a/c outlets.
- A/C must be distributed throughout the classroom.

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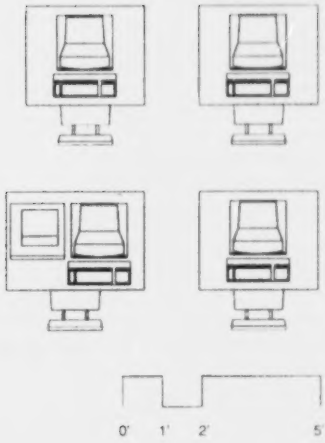
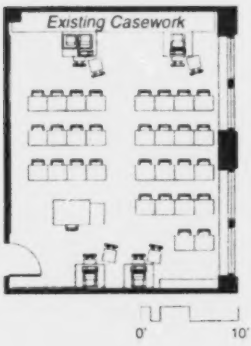




Above: *Plan diagram of four cart-based desktop computers. The cart on the lower left measures 30" by 42" and also has a printer. The other carts measure 30" by 36".*

Left: *Plan diagram of a Cart-based Configuration in typical classroom. Note that the carts can be located adjacent to any open, unobstructed a/c outlet and compactly stored after use.*

5. Portable Systems — Laptop Computer Configuration

Basic Components

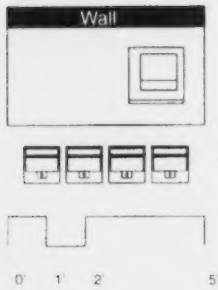
- Four Laptop Computers
- One Charging Station (Fixed or Mobile) for Four Lap Computers
- One Printer

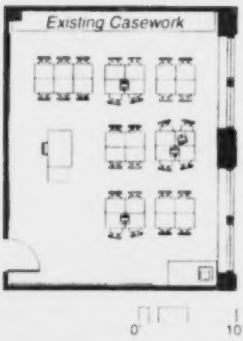
Advantages

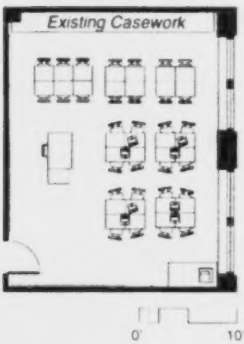
- Requires the least amount of dedicated furnishings space of all of the options.
- May place the smallest draw upon existing po resources. Demands on the electrical infrastructure battery charging may be shifted to off-hour periods
- The computers can be freely distributed throughout classroom enabling them to be fully integrated into the riculum.
- Adjacency to other computers or furnishings is not in ently a constraint on the number of students that can w together at the computers.
- Laptop computers, in general, have evolved to the poin being comparable to desktop computers in process power and available peripherals. Screen resolution size are both increasing and "active matrix" or "Thin Technology" screens provide high quality displays.

Disadvantages

- Battery life in Portable Computers is currently lim requiring the use of multiple batteries over extended p ods of time.
- A printing station will need to be provided in the classro







Top: *Plan diagram of the components of the Laptop Configuration. The printer is shown sitting on a 30" by 60" re-charging station. This station could be built into existing casework.*

Above: *Plan diagram of Laptop Configuration in typical classroom.*

Left: *Plan diagram of Laptop Configuration in typical classroom if two classes were to share laptops. (See Note 3).*

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at the recharging station, or in a common resource center.

- Laptop computers are generally more fragile than desktop computers. (see Note 2)
- Laptop computers can be more expensive than desktop computers depending upon the features selected.
- The portability of laptops increases the need for security precautions. Heavier and larger laptops may mitigate this problem somewhat.

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6. Hybrid Systems — One Desktop and Three Laptop Computers

Basic Components

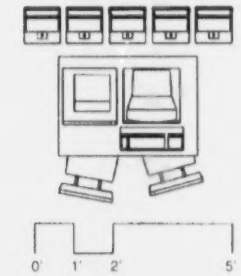
- One Desktop Computer
- One Computer Station with Chair
- Three Laptop Computers
- One Charging Station (Fixed or Mobile) for Three Laptop Computers
- One Printer

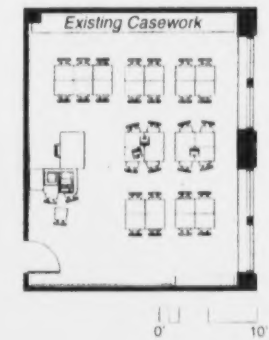
Advantages

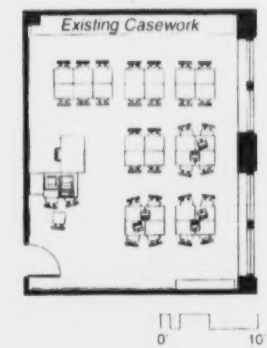
- Three computers can be freely distributed throughout the classroom enabling them to be fully integrated into the curriculum.
- Adjacency to other computers or furnishings is not inherently a constraint on the number of students that can work together at the computers.
- The desktop computer can be cart-based to also provide mobility.
- The desktop computer can act as a printing and demonstration station for work begun on the laptops.
- The desktop computer can also be configured to provide greater storage, communications and presentation capabilities than the laptops, concentrating expenditures on one computer to provide features that would not otherwise be available.

Disadvantages

- Same as Option 5.







Top: *Plan diagram of the Hybrid Configuration. Three laptops are shown above a cart-based desktop computer and printer. Recharging station for the laptops is assumed to be in casework.*

Above: *Plan diagram of the Hybrid Configuration in typical classroom.*

Left: *Plan diagram of the Hybrid Configuration in typical classroom if two classes were to share laptops (see Note 3).*

Decision Making Framework

In this section we have developed a decision making framework to help select the appropriate option for particular circumstances.

The basic decision making framework can be summarized in four questions:

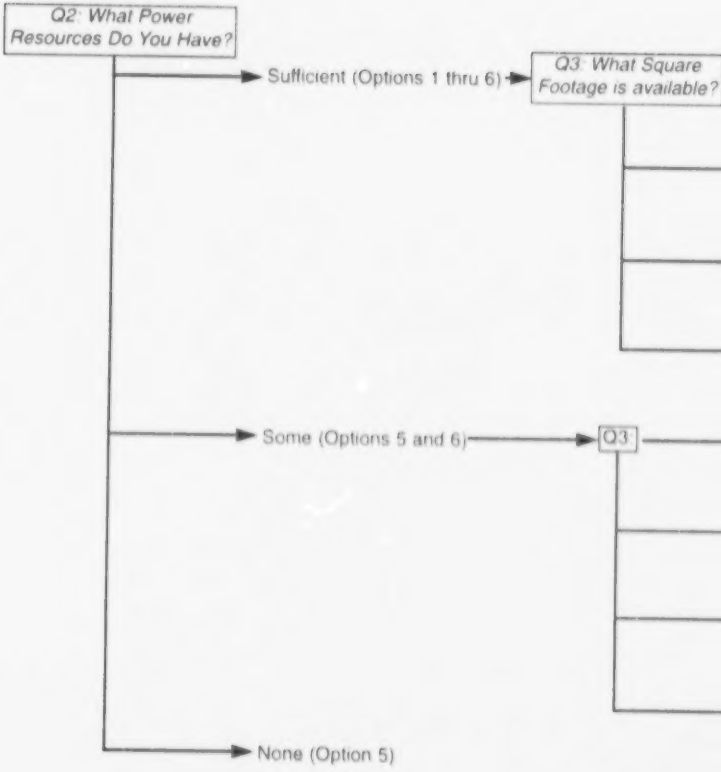
1. Are there any overriding curricular demands that require one configuration versus another?
2. What are the constraints on the power supply to the classroom?
3. How much available square footage is available?
4. How much lineal feet of perimeter wall space is available?

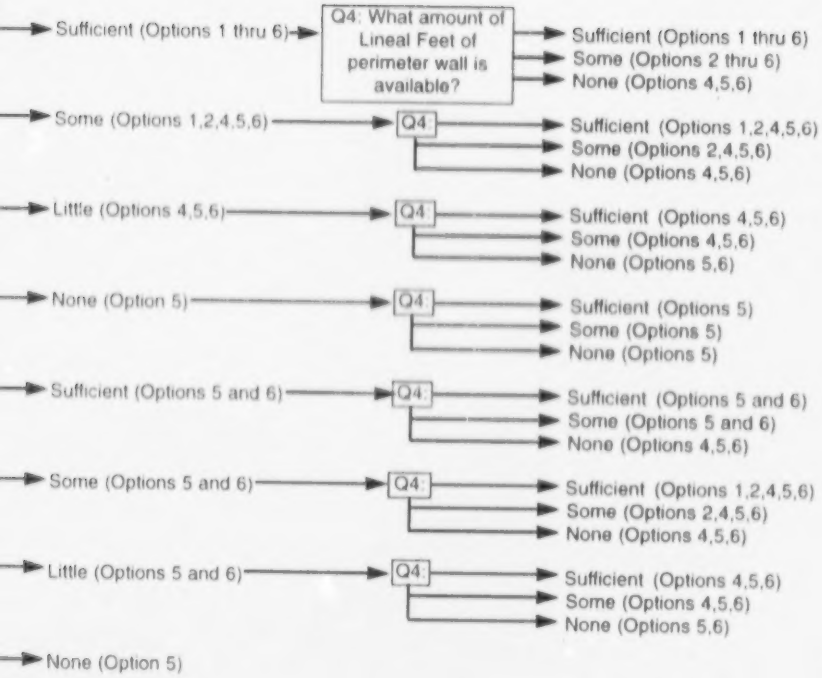
By answering these questions in sequence, the most appropriate option can be easily selected. The decision tree presented on the following page, is a graphic representation of this process. If the answer to the first question posed above is "No," then responses to the next three questions will move the inquiry through the branches of the tree until only the most viable options are left for consideration. If the answer to the first question is "Yes," then the use of the tree is unnecessary and power and space should be provided (if it is economically feasible) to accommodate the selected option.

For reference, the Options are numbered:

1. Perimeter
2. Peninsular
3. Island
4. Cart-based
5. Laptop
6. Hybrid (desktop and laptop)

Decision Tree


Q2: What Power Resources Do You Have?
Sufficient (Options 1 thru 6)
Q3: What Square Footage is available?
Some (Options 5 and 6)
Q3
None (Option 5)


Sufficient (Options 1 thru 6)
Q4: What amount of Lineal Feet of perimeter wall is available?
Sufficient (Options 1 thru 6)
Some (Options 2 thru 6)
None (Options 4,5,6)
Some (Options 1,2,4,5,6)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 1,2,4,5,6)
Some (Options 2,4,5,6)
None (Options 4,5,6)
Little (Options 4,5,6)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 4,5,6)
Some (Options 4,5,6)
None (Options 5,6)
None (Option 5)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 5)
Some (Options 5)
None (Options 5)
Sufficient (Options 5 and 6)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 5 and 6)
Some (Options 5 and 6)
None (Options 4,5,6)
Some (Options 5 and 6)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 1,2,4,5,6)
Some (Options 2,4,5,6)
None (Options 4,5,6)
Little (Options 5 and 6)
Q4:
Sufficient (Options 4,5,6)
Some (Options 4,5,6)
None (Options 5,6)
None (Option 5)

Recommended Option

Before proceeding, it should be noted that this recommend
based on limited data. The short time frame in which the
was performed did not permit visiting a significant num
schools or talking with many teachers that are currently u
educational technology in New York City. However, retur
the three questions presented in the Introduction regardi
constraints of existing infrastructure and space, flexib
accommodate trends in using educational technology in
rooms, and the need to achieve the greatest return on the
ment, has influenced us to offer a recommendation.

The decision-making framework presented in the previous s
is structured to enable the selection of the most appr
options considering site specific conditions and to respond
ticular curricular requirements. Unless there is a specific c
stance that requires the use of another option, we recomme
following option be implemented.

Recommended Option

Our recommended option is Number 6, a hybrid using one d
computer, three laptop computers and one printer connected
desktop computer. This option is recommended because it

- Minimizes the impact on, and any associated modific
to, existing electrical infrastructure. (See below for
detail.)
- Requires almost no dedicated furniture, reducing ex
tures on furniture and freeing valuable floor and per
space for other activities.
- Creates the greatest potential for students to work
individually or collaboratively in groups comprised of
four students by removing limitations resulting from
cency conflicts between computers.

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Top: *Students using laptop computers at Methodist Ladies' College. (from Redefining the Place to Learn, NJIT, 1994*

- Creates opportunities for sharing computers betwe classes. For example, two classes could share six lapt computers between them. With the addition of a fixed cart-based desktop computer in each class, seven comp ers can be in use in a classroom at one time.
- Provides a fixed printing and presentation station at the o desktop computer (that could be cart-based) which c also be outfitted, initially or in the future, with more robu multi-media presentation and communications capabiliti than available in the laptops.
- Permits students to use the laptops in a variety of settin around the classroom. For example, a student could use laptop at his or her desk, at a library/resource center, at t teachers desk, at a science center, or at all of the above
- Would be a significantly faster option to implement th most of the other options that would require more substa tial modifications to a building's electrical power and/or d tribution system. In short, more of the City's investme would be allocated directly to purchasing computers a software.
- Would easily accommodate additional laptop computers the future without requiring virtually any additional space

According to one source at Consolidated Edison's research di sion, using laptop computers is the most viable option for installi educational technology in most existing schools without extensi modifications to the electrical infrastructure.

Laptop computers can be operated either from a battery or th can be plugged in with an a/c adapter. Current battery technolo provides between 1 and 2 hours of use per battery and many mo els offer the ability to swap batteries quickly. (At the Method Ladies' College in Kew, Victoria, Australia, where every stude (spanning ages 6 to 18) has a laptop computer, strategies to mi

Top: *Students using laptop computers in "the field". (from Portable Computers Pilot Evaluation Report, NCET, Coventry, England, 1994*

mize energy usage have generally extended battery life to two hours.) Spare batteries could also be provided to extend the use of the computers. As well, some models have the option of using two batteries at a time.

Even when plugged in via an a/c adapter, laptops draw less power than desktop computers. Measured in Watts (W) for example, a laptop generally requires only 35W to 70W, while a comparable desktop computer requires 145W to 200W for the computer itself and another 100W for the monitor.

To recharge and store laptop computers, several schools studied as precedents (including the Covington School in Birmingham, Michigan and the Methodist Ladies' College) have developed secure shelves or carts where the computers can be locked up while recharging. The Covington School design is cart-based and it is accordingly, available to be moved to whatever classroom needs the computers (similar carts are commercially available). To reduce demand for a/c power during the day recharging the laptops' batteries can be limited to off-peak hours, for instance, over night. As well, in some instances, enough power may be available to recharge batteries during the course of the day. (See Note 4)

The recharging station does not have to be much larger than the combined size of the laptop computers and a six battery recharger. It may be possible to build the recharging station right into existing casework. Another idea to consider is that the Covington School's recharging/storage stations have been designed to accommodate to additional laptops that may be purchased in the future.

Notes

1. The Covington School, in Birmingham, Michigan, featuring a science and technology-oriented program for grades 3 through 8, has a current student to computer ratio of 6 to 1. The student to computer ratio has important implications for lesson planning. If one-third of the class cannot be accommodated on the computers (in pairs) at one time, consideration should be given to designing so that additional computers can be added later. This situation may arise in classes that have over 27 students.

2. The computer hardware industry is beginning to address the "fragility" of laptop computers. Apple Computer, on its corporate Website, touts the forthcoming eMate 300 "mobile computer for education" as "rugged." According to one contact, the Thorton Middle School in Thorton, Colorado, based upon their experience with educational technology, and laptop computers in particular, is planning to (subject to available funding) provide six eMate computers in every classroom for a total of between 90 to 120 computers.

Following a study of 118 schools in England, that are using portable computers, the United Kingdom's National Foundation for Educational Research recommended the following when purchasing laptop computers:

- Carefully review the service contracts
- Check the quality of the screens
- Check that the hinges between the screen and the body are "robust."
- Check that the connectors used for the a/c adapters are solidly built. (Also noted at The Covington School.)

Robustness is also related to the weight of laptop computers and how much a child can reasonably carry. This was mentioned by Methodist Ladies' College in Kew, Victoria, Australia, where nearly

2000 laptop computers are in use by the students and at the Covington School, in Birmingham, MI, which provides over 60 laptop computers for student use. The contact at the Covington School suggested that while they have not had any laptops dropped, the computers should feature handles to make it easier for the children to carry.

3. One example of the portability of laptops enabling a class to increase the number of computers used by the students at one time is the Summit Ridge Middle School in Lakewood, CO. At this school two teams, of approximately 150 to 170 student each, share 30 laptops. These 30 laptops are available to each teacher for use during class, resulting in a one-to-one student to computer ratio. Teachers at Summit Ridge can also bring "a/v carts" into the classroom which have desktop computers with greater multi-media capability than the laptops. Both the laptops and the a/v carts can connect to a large video monitor provided to each classroom.

4. The ability to recharge batteries during the day may be desirable. The ability to do so is dependent upon several issues including the power consumption of the laptops specified, the type of battery used, power consumption of the battery recharger, the electrical capacity of the particular school, the existing distribution system and the number of open outlets.

As an example of the power required, one manufacturer's (single) battery recharger requires 18 volts at 2 amps. If the cumulative power requirements of a number of batteries charging at one time is too great, several chargers could be sequenced to recharge one or two batteries at a time.

Glossary

Charging Station	A place for recharging, and possibly for providing secure storage, for laptop computers and their batteries. The charging station could take on a variety of configurations including a mobile cart or a fixed cabinet. It could be built-into existing casework, to save space.
Desktop Computer	A computer that, by design, is relatively fixed in place. Typically, these computers have monitors, pointing devices and keyboards that are separate from a "case" containing the CPU and assorted peripherals.
Educational Technology	Electronic devices that are used as part of a curriculum, including computers, printers, scanners.
Laptop Computer	A computer that is designed to be largely battery operated. The elements comprising these computers (including screens, pointing devices and keyboards) are often integral to the housing design of these machines. In this document this phrase is used to also represent "notebook" and "sub-notebook" computers.